

Take Your Sleep When You Like, Old Tales on Subject Poo-Poed

Roy O. Gilbert, M.D., Los Angeles Co. Health Officer. No one knows exactly what sleep is, although recently published medical information described it as a conditioned reflex to which the individual must give heed sooner or later. But, according to one of the world's leading brain surgeons, the traditional requirement of

8 hours sleep per day is simply a "baseless fetish." From his report, he concludes that sleep is something by way of being an individualistic phenomenon. Sleep has nothing to do with a shortage of blood in the brain, or an accumulation of lactic acid within the body (fatigue poisons in the muscles), nor any changes in the nervous sys-

tem. Neither is there any sleep center in the brain that acts as a regulator. All of these explanations, given at one time or another to account for the necessity of sleep, are medical fallacies that have been put forth to explain the hitherto inexplicable. Many medical scientists are now of the opinion that there

is a "waking center" within some nerve cells in the lower part of the brain. Sleep comes when this center is no longer stimulated by certain enzymes—substances that act as catalysts or activators within the body. Just how it happens is unknown.

Neither is sleep to be confused with unconsciousness. Certain impulses, particularly those to which the individual is conditioned, may get through to the waking center from higher brain levels and rouse him when asleep. Such impulses as those that wake up a mother when an infant whimpers although much louder noises will leave her sleep undisturbed.

Take It in Shifts
Sleeping little matters little, say specialists in the subject. What does matter is the anxiety that lack of sleep produces in people who are convinced that they must have a certain amount of it at a stretch no matter how induced. Actually there is physiological reason why the needed amount of sleep cannot be taken in shifts if the person either prefers to get it that way or cannot get it in any other. And one time of the day is apparently as good as another.

Nor is going without sleep for extended periods nearly as harmful as many people are inclined to think. Laboratory experiments with a group of men at the University of Chicago show that a person may keep awake for 80 to 100 hours at a time without suffering any permanent ill-effects whatsoever. Irritable, unable to concentrate, or incapable of any sustained effort near the end of the experiment, the human guinea pigs were all back to normal after one night's sleep.

Requirements Vary
Certainly sleep requirements vary with the individual. Some people do very well on 6 hours or less each day, but others feel they need 9 or 10, or even more. Most people, from habit it is said, require 8 hours of sleep out of every 24. One research scientist claims that 7 is absolutely all that is needed. Anything extra is called "luxury consumption" or "escape from boredom." However, it may be that the individual is best able to judge for himself just how much sleep he needs in order to maintain a feeling of well-being.

Experts hand out a lot of advice to insomniacs. There are, among others, oft-repeated admonitions to relax, stop worrying, make oneself comfortable, establish regular sleep habits, have the surroundings dark and quiet, eat a little before going to bed, or take a "nightcap."

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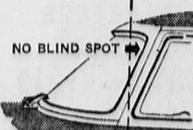
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